United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea SPLOS/157

Meeting of States Parties

Distr.: General
30 April 2007

Original: English

Seventeenth Meeting
New York, 14 and 18-22 June 2007

Issues related to the workload of the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf

Note by the Secretariat

Summary

The present note has been prepared by the Secretariat in response to the request contained in the decision taken by the sixteenth Meeting of States Parties on issues related to the proposals by the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (SPLOS/144). Taking into account the discussions held within the Commission during its recent sessions, the note provides details and facts relating to all proposals made by the sixteenth Meeting of States Parties to deal with the workload of the Commission (SPLOS/148, para. 71).

07-32578 (E) 220507

I. Introduction

1. At its fifteenth session (4-22 April 2005), the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf decided to draw the attention of the Meeting of States Parties to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea to the difficulties posed by the projected workload associated with future submissions to the Commission by coastal States. It was decided that the Chairman of the Commission should make a detailed presentation at the fifteenth Meeting of States Parties on "the workload facing the Commission in connection with the examination of the submissions, both actual and projected, including quantification of hours and resources required to complete the necessary tasks" (CLCS/44, para. 51).

2. At the fifteenth Meeting of States Parties (16-24 June 2005), the Chairman made a PowerPoint presentation on the projected workload of the Commission. He emphasized that the presentation was based on different scenarios and his personal estimates of the time required to complete the examination of individual submissions. On the assumption that there would be 10 sessions held by the end of 2009, with an average of 19 members attending each session, the Chairman outlined three scenarios, characterized by different numbers of States making submissions. He also explained that an average of two to three subcommissions could be established to work in parallel at any given time (see SPLOS/135, paras. 66-73).

3. At its sixteenth session (29 August-16 September 2005), the Commission noted that it needed to increase the number or duration of sessions convened each year. Some members of the Commission underlined, however, that there were constraints on time and funding to allow those members to spend an increased amount of time in New York as the States parties had not foreseen such a heavy workload and financial implications. In order to find a satisfactory solution, the Commission decided that the matter would be brought to the attention of the General Assembly and the Meeting of the States Parties (CLCS/48, para. 38).

4. At its seventeenth session (20 March-21 April 2006), the Commission adopted a proposal for consideration by the sixteenth Meeting of States Parties (19-23 June 2006), as contained in the annex to the Statement by the Chairman of the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf on the progress of work in the Commission (CLCS/50).

5. At the sixteenth Meeting of States Parties, the Chairman outlined two issues of urgent importance, namely, (a) additional requirements for staff, facilities and software and hardware essential for the consideration of submissions and (b) issues related to the workload of the members of the Commission and the funding of their participation in the sessions of the Commission and the meetings of subcommissions.

6. The summary of those discussions is contained in the report of the sixteenth Meeting of States Parties (SPLOS/148, paras. 67-78). Having deliberated on the issue in open-ended informal consultations, the States parties adopted a draft decision emanating from those consultations, without a vote (SPLOS/148, para. 78).

7. In the "Decision on issues related to the proposals by the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf", it was noted "that during the sixteenth Meeting of States Parties the proposals by the Commission as well as additional proposals made by participating States were discussed without a decision being taken due to a lack

of sufficient background information", and the Secretariat was requested "to prepare, based on the discussions at the sixteenth Meeting of States Parties and in due time before the next Meeting, an information note providing relevant details or facts regarding all proposals that have been made" (SPLOS/144, para. 5).

8. At its eighteenth session (21 August-15 September 2006), the "Commission decided to deliberate on the matter, with reference, inter alia, to paragraph 71 of the report of the sixteenth Meeting of States Parties, containing a list of options, other than financing the Commission from the regular budget of the United Nations, that the Meeting suggested as worth exploring. The members of the Commission noted that a number of those options had already been discussed within the Commission, and that some of them had been implemented" (CLCS/52, para. 37).

9. At its nineteenth session (5 March-13 April 2007), the Commission continued its discussion of matters related to the workload of the Commission, taking into account the decision of the sixteenth Meeting of States Parties. It decided that the conclusion of the discussion would be contained in the statement of the Chairman as well as in his letter to the President of the seventeenth Meeting of States Parties (14 June and 18-22 June 2007).

10. In view of the importance of the issue for the successful performance of its functions, the Commission decided that the Chairman also would prepare a presentation to be delivered during the seventeenth Meeting of States Parties, at which, on behalf of the Commission, he would address matters related to the workload of the Commission.

11. At the same session, the Secretariat presented an informal paper containing elements to be included in the present information note, which was submitted to the members of the Commission for their information and feedback, as appropriate. The members of the Commission expressed their appreciation for the work done by the Secretariat in this regard and for the information contained in the document and provided their feedback and suggestions.

II. Details and facts regarding the proposals made by the sixteenth Meeting of States Parties

12. In response to the request made by the sixteenth Meeting of States Parties (see para. 7 above), and taking into account the discussions within the Commission during its recent sessions, the Secretariat provides the following details and facts regarding the proposals made by the sixteenth Meeting of States Parties (SPLOS/148, para. 71).

Queuing of submissions

13. During his presentation to the fifteenth Meeting of States Parties, the Chairman of the Commission indicated that, in the absence of changes to its current working methods and in view of the projected number of submissions, the Commission might be forced to consider the possibility of queuing the consideration of the submissions received.

14. At its eighteenth session, the Commission adopted a decision (see CLCS/52, para. 38), which read as follows:

> In view of the increasing number of submissions and in order to organize its work in the most efficient way, the Commission decided that the following rules will apply to the submissions received after the end of the eighteenth session of the Commission:
>
> 1. Only three subcommissions shall function simultaneously while considering submissions.
>
> 2. The submissions shall be queued in the order they are received.
>
> 3. The submission next in line shall be taken for consideration by a subcommission only after one of the three working subcommissions presents its recommendations to the Commission.

15. That decision was temporary and partial in nature, and is subject to review, depending on the availability of additional funding and related resources that would permit longer and more frequent sessions (see CLCS/52, para. 39).

More efficient use of time and facilities

16. The efficient use of time by the Commission and the availability of technical facilities and state-of-the-art equipment and software are closely interrelated.

Use of time

17. At its sixteenth session, the Commission decided to increase the frequency of the meetings of its subcommissions. The Commission and its subcommissions normally hold two meetings per day for the duration of their respective sessions.

Use of facilities

18. The Commission has discussed the issue of availability and use of facilities on several occasions and its Chairman has brought detailed requests by the Commission to the attention of the Secretariat and the Meeting of States Parties in letters addressed to the Director of the Division, on 2 July 2004 (see CLCS/42, para. 48), the President of the fifteenth Meeting of States Parties, on 5 May 2005 (see SPLOS/129 para. 19), the Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs, the Legal Counsel, on 6 July 2005 (see CLCS/48, para. 56) and the Secretary-General, on 9 September 2005.

19. Despite budgetary limitations, the Secretariat addressed each request received from the Commission.

20. With the exception of plenary meetings of the sessions of the Commission, which require full conference services, including interpretation, all meetings of the subcommissions and also some plenary meetings of the Commission are held at the premises of the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea, Office of Legal Affairs. The facilities of the Division are made available to the Commission on the basis of the approved calendar of meetings of the Commission and its subcommissions.

21. At its fourteenth (30 August-3 September 2004) and sixteenth sessions, the Commission indicated with concern that the availability of only two Geographic

Information System (GIS) laboratories and of limited office space and computer equipment did not allow it to operate at its full potential, namely through up to three subcommissions (see CLCS/42, paras. 48-50, CLCS/44, paras. 47-51, and CLCS/48, paras. 56-58).

22. In response to the Commission's requests, the Secretariat upgraded the technical facilities and the equipment of the conference room of the Division, which can at present be used also as a third GIS laboratory. In addition, a suite of offices was provided to the members of the Commission for individual research and work. When the three subcommissions are meeting simultaneously, the GIS facilities are used to their full potential.

23. However, not all GIS laboratories are equipped with equally powerful computers. Consequently, they are assigned to subcommissions in accordance with the computing requirements of each submission. That practice may not be applicable in the future since it is hoped that, in order to ensure the greatest flexibility in the work of the Commission, all three laboratories will be equipped to permit examination of any submission. Those issues are subject to ongoing review as hardware and software need to be up to date (see paras. 53-64 below). However, owing to budgetary restrictions, the Secretariat is not currently in a position to provide the latest technology in all three GIS laboratories at the same time.

24. At its nineteenth session, members of the Commission pointed out that the library of the Division does not contain adequate reference material to support the needs of the Commission. Specifically, there is a shortage of scientific publications related to the continental shelf. Members requested the Secretariat to take action to improve the situation.

Longer sessions of the Commission, with increased costs to be defrayed by States nominating the members of the Commission

25. At its fourteenth session, several members of the Commission observed that, given the number and volume of projected submissions, two sessions per year of one week of plenary meetings followed by two weeks of subcommission meetings were no longer sufficient to deal with the workload. A thorough examination of submissions by the Commission would require the duration of the plenary of each session to be increased to at least two weeks.

26. At the same session, concern was expressed regarding the process through which members of the Commission are appointed as members of a subcommission. Several members of the Commission indicated that they may not be in a position to participate in the work of a new subcommission they may be appointed to. That was owing to the fact that the travel authorization from their Governments did not include the period to be devoted to the work of that subcommission since the appointment to such subcommission was not known at the time of the travel authorization. In the view of those members, that meant that only members whose travel was authorized and financed for the duration of the full session would be available for appointment to new subcommissions. That would hinder implementation of the provisions of article 5 of annex II to the Convention, according to which the members of a subcommission should be "appointed in a balanced manner taking into account the specific elements of each submission". That would also hinder implementation of rule 42, subparagraph (c), of the rules of procedure of the Commission (CLCS/40), according to which "the appointment of

members of a subcommission should be done taking into account ... the specific elements of the submission as well as, to the extent possible, the need to ensure a scientific and geographical balance".

27. The financial assistance provided by the trust fund for the purpose of defraying the cost of participation of the members of the Commission from developing States in the meetings of the Commission may have, to a certain degree, addressed these concerns (see paras. 65-67 below).

28. At its sixteenth session, the Commission noted again the need to further increase the number or duration of sessions convened each year. However, it was underlined that there were constraints on time and funding that made it difficult for members of the Commission, whose participation was financed by their Governments, to spend more time in New York as the States parties had not foreseen such a heavy workload or the financial implications. The Commission decided that the matter would be brought to the attention of the General Assembly and the Meeting of the States Parties (see CLCS/48, para. 38).

29. At its eighteenth session, in view of the forthcoming election of its members, the Commission pointed out that the States nominating new members might not be entirely aware of the financial implications, as provided for in article 2, paragraph 5, of annex II to the Convention, according to which the State party which submitted the nomination of a member of the Commission should defray the expenses of that member while in performance of Commission duties (see CLCS/52, para. 55).

30. When addressing the sixteenth Meeting of States Parties, the Chairman highlighted issues related to the workload of the Commission and the funding of participation by its members in its sessions and the meetings of subcommissions. He recalled that the matter had been brought to the attention of the fifteenth Meeting and reiterated that under the current arrangements, the Commission might not be in a position to perform its functions in an efficient and timely manner. He also stated that the Commission had decided to recommend that the sixteenth Meeting of States Parties consider a draft decision (SPLOS/140, annex), which proposed, through a draft resolution for consideration by the General Assembly, that the members of the Commission receive emoluments and expenses while they are performing Commission duties concerning the consideration of submissions made by coastal States on the outer limits of the continental shelf under article 76, and that such emoluments and expenses be defrayed through the regular budget of the United Nations.

31. At its nineteenth session, the Commission decided to reiterate the above proposal, and that the Chairman would reintroduce that proposal in his letter to the President of the seventeenth Meeting of States Parties and include it in his presentation to that Meeting. It also requested the Secretariat to provide the necessary information on the programme budget implications of that decision.

32. The duration of the last five sessions, including both plenary meetings of the Commission and meetings by the subcommissions (without intersessional meetings, which are described in paras. 33-35 below), was as follows:

(a) Fifteenth session: (4-22 April 2005, 1 week of plenary meetings and 2 weeks of meetings of the subcommissions established to examine the submissions made by Australia and Brazil);

(b) Sixteenth session: (29 August-16 September 2005, 1 week of plenary meetings and 2 weeks of meetings of the subcommissions established to examine the submissions made by Australia, Brazil and Ireland);

(c) Seventeenth session: (20 March-21 April 2006, 1 week of plenary meetings and 4 weeks of meetings of the subcommissions established to examine the submissions made by Australia, Brazil and Ireland);

(d) Eighteenth session: (21 August-15 September 2006, 1 week of plenary meetings and 4 weeks of meetings of the subcommissions established to examine the submissions made by Australia, Brazil, Ireland, New Zealand and, jointly, France, Ireland, Spain and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland);

(e) Nineteenth session: (5 March-13 April 2007, 2 weeks of plenary meetings and 4 weeks of meetings of the subcommissions established to examine the submissions made by Australia, Brazil, New Zealand, Norway and, jointly, France, Ireland, Spain and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland).

More frequent intersessional meetings

33. Following the debates concerning the need to devote more time to the examination of submissions, in 2005, the Commission started to convene intersessional meetings of its subcommissions in the GIS laboratories of the Division. The scheduling of such meetings depends on the programme of work agreed upon by the members of each subcommission and on the availability of their members during the intersessional period.

34. As indicated in paragraph 32, the subcommissions established to examine the submissions made by Australia, Brazil, Ireland, New Zealand, Norway and, jointly, by France, Ireland, Spain and the United Kingdom, have held their meetings during, or in conjunction with, the regular sessions of the Commission. In addition, intersessional meetings, which required separate travel to New York, were also held, as indicated below:

(a) 27 June-1 July 2005, subcommission established to consider the submission made by Australia;

(b) 22 August-26 August 2005, subcommission established to consider the submission made by Brazil;

(c) 23-27 January 2006, subcommission established to consider the submission made by Ireland;

(d) 13-17 November 2006, subcommission established to consider the submission made by New Zealand;

(e) 22 January-2 February 2007, subcommission established to consider the joint submission made by France, Ireland, Spain and the United Kingdom.

35. It must be noted that since such intersessional meetings do not occur during or in conjunction with the regular sessions of the Commissions, they have implications from both the time and financial points of view for members of the subcommissions and the Governments that defray the cost of participation of the members of the Commission, depleting the trust fund for the purpose of defraying the cost of

participation of the members of the Commission from developing States in the meetings of the Commission.

Increasing the amount of work carried out by the members at home during the intersessional period

36. While, in its view, the most productive interaction and work takes place during its sessions and in the meetings of the subcommissions (see CLCS/52 para. 37), the Commission has addressed, on several occasions, the volume of work to be carried out individually by its members during intersessional periods to increase the efficiency of its sessions. It noted that a further increase in the volume of such work might be expected in view of the size, complexity and increasing number of submissions under examination. It noted, however, that such individual work could not replace the examination of submissions carried out collectively by members of a subcommission.

37. At its fifteenth session, the Commission discussed the workload for its members as well as the funding available to them to ensure their participation in the meetings of subcommissions. The members of the Commission noted that the examination of submissions required complicated work during not only the sessions of the subcommissions but also the intersessional periods (see CLCS/44, para. 49).

38. Due to its complexity, the examination of submissions extends for long periods during regular and intersessional periods, thus presenting difficulties for all members of the Commission (see CLCS/44, para. 50, and SPLOS/129, para. 20). Various proposals had been made regarding the issue, including that the members of the Commission might need to devote full-time attention during certain periods to the examination of the submissions (see CLCS/44, para. 51).

39. At its eighteenth session, in view of the election of the members that will be held in June 2007, the Commission pointed out that States making nominations might not be entirely aware of the fact that each member of a subcommission, in addition to participating in the sessions of the Commission and the meetings of the subcommissions, is required, individually, to undertake lengthy intersessional work related to the analysis of the submissions and the preparation of recommendations. Therefore, according to the views of some members of the Commission, the nominating State should adequately support nominees in connection with such individual intersessional work. As in the case of financial support (see para. 29 above), the Commission decided to draw the attention of States to that aspect for their consideration when making nominations (see CLCS/52, para. 55).

40. At its nineteenth session, the members of the Commission also pointed out that the productivity of their intersessional work depends on the availability of software applications comparable to those available in the GIS laboratories of the Division, licences for which may be expensive and beyond the means of individual members. It is noted that two submitting States have made available to members of the Subcommissions examining their submissions software packages necessary to carry out their examinations when away from the GIS laboratories of the Division.

Staggering of meetings and, consequently, more efficient use of the Division's premises throughout the year

41. This proposal is directly related to the planning of the sessions of the Commission and the meetings of the subcommissions. The relevant details and facts have been provided above (paras. 16-24 and 33-35).

Use of current technologies such as videoconferencing

42. The scientific and technical nature of the work of the Commission requires the use of state-of-the-art technologies and equipment. Details concerning the use of such tools for the examination of submissions is described in further detail below (see paras. 53-64). This section focuses on the utilization by the Commission of modern technologies for carrying out its work during the intersessional period. For this purpose, the Secretariat, in collaboration with relevant departments, has provided a secure online forum for the members of the Commission, enabling them to continue their discussion and to exchange electronic files during the intersessional period.

43. At the sixteenth Meeting of States Parties, the Director of the Division addressed issues related to the use of advanced technology. He pointed out that in view of the volume and confidentiality of data, some of the technological solutions proposed by members at the Meeting might be too expensive and impractical and no substitution for personal interaction and discussion among the members during their meetings in New York. He also pointed out complex issues related to the availability of software, licensing and export regulations (see SPLOS/148, para. 77).

44. Concerning videoconferencing, it should be noted that not all required technology and infrastructures may be available in the countries of the members of the Commission, making full use of such tools unfeasible. Members felt that the use of such tools could jeopardize the confidentiality of the information in submissions and of the meetings of subcommissions.

Adoption of internal procedural measures to ensure a more efficient conduct of the Commission's work

45. The Commission keeps its rules of procedure and practice under constant review in order to adequately address concerns by States and to include the lessons learned in the course of its work. Changes to the rules are contained in the statements of the Chairman and, from time to time, are consolidated in a revised version of the rules of procedure of the Commission.

46. At its eighteenth session, the Commission considered measures to increase the efficiency of the work of the Commission (see CLCS/52, para. 40). It agreed, inter alia, that the Commission would adopt the following practice:

> At the stage of the examination and consideration of a submission by the subcommission:
>
> 1. The full content of the submission of any State is in principle available at any time for examination by all members of the Commission. Practical ways to view the material should be agreed upon with the Secretariat.
>
> 2. The written records of the internal proceedings of a subcommission are not confidential vis-à-vis the other Commission members.

3. The written communications between a subcommission and the coastal State shall be copied to all members of the Commission.

4. All members of the Commission may freely discuss between them any matters related to any submission, notwithstanding the fact that it is the prerogative and responsibility of the subcommission, through private deliberations, to carry out the examination of a submission on behalf of the Commission and to prepare the final recommendations for consideration by the Commission.

47. During its nineteenth session, one member of the Commission pointed out that the rules of procedure allowed for venues other than United Nations Headquarters in New York to be designated by the Commission in consultation with any coastal State which made a submission, and suggested that part of the examination of certain submissions could be carried out in that State. According to rule 4 of the rules of procedure of the Commission, meetings that take place in venues other than Headquarters must be at no additional cost, directly or indirectly, to the United Nations.

Giving consideration to the sustainable level of scrutiny the Commission can give to each submission

48. The members of the Commission have repeatedly pointed out that each submission deserves a thorough examination in view of its responsibilities under article 76 of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and its annex II. They have also emphasized that the time spent examining a submission is proportional to its complexity and the volume of data contained therein.

49. Each submission to the Commission contains data and information, including hydrographic, bathymetric, geophysical and geodesic data, the volume of which can cover from several hundreds to several thousands of pages. Article 76 of the Convention and the Scientific and Technical Guidelines require that examinations follow several steps.

50. The Commission adopted certain amendments to its rules of procedure, in response to statements made by several delegations at the fifteenth Meeting of States Parties (CLCS/50, paras. 31-45). When adopting them, the Commission recognized that those amendments, which envisage increased interaction between the Commission, the relevant subcommission and submitting States, may affect the time required for the consideration of submissions (see CLCS/50, para. 45).

Reducing the number of members per subcommission in order to allow the establishment of more subcommissions

51. Article 5 of annex II to the Convention stipulates that "Unless the Commission decides otherwise, the Commission shall function by way of subcommissions composed of seven members, appointed in a balanced manner taking into account the specific elements of each submission by a coastal State". Rule 42 of the rules of procedure of the Commission (CLCS/40) provides that:

1. If, in accordance with article 5 of annex II to the Convention, the Commission decides to establish a subcommission for the consideration of a submission, it shall:

...

(c) Through informal consultations among the members of the Commission, nominate candidates for the subcommission ... taking into account ... the specific elements of the submission as well as, to the extent possible, the need to ensure a scientific and geographical balance; and

(d) Appoint from among the nominated candidates seven members of the subcommission.

52. When establishing the subcommissions, the Commission has consistently proceeded in accordance with those provisions, appointing from among nominated candidates seven members of each subcommission, taking into account the specific elements of the submission as well as the need to ensure, to the extent possible, a balanced scientific and geographical representation (see, inter alia, CLCS/32, para. 16, and CLCS/42, para. 19). It is noted that, when necessary, current subcommissions have sought the advice of other members of the Commission who specialize in areas of expertise not already represented within the subcommission. The reduction of the number of members in each subcommission may not be in conformity with the provisions of the Convention and would also go against the need to ensure a balanced scientific composition of those bodies, as evidenced by the trend described above.

Increasing the support provided by the Secretariat and the degree of its involvement in processing submissions

53. The Secretariat, in addition to servicing the sessions of the Commission and meetings of the subcommissions, carries out a significant number of GIS tasks, as well as tasks related to the receipt, recording and custody of submissions, and ensures the confidentiality thereof. The Secretariat also provides specially equipped premises, hardware and software and qualified staff, at a substantial cost to the United Nations. Without such support, the Commission would not be in a position to discharge its functions.

54. In view of the responsibilities of the members of the Commission with regard to the examination of submissions, tasks that require scientific or technical judgement cannot be delegated to the Secretariat. For the same reason and because of concerns of confidentiality, none of those tasks could be outsourced (CLCS/44, para. 49).

55. In anticipation of a significantly increased number of submissions and considerable expansion of its activities, on behalf of the Commission, the Chairman has addressed letters to the Secretary-General, the Legal Counsel and the President of the Meeting of States Parties to the Convention, highlighting the need for a strengthening of the Secretariat's capacities to facilitate the work of the Commission and accurate and expeditious examination of submissions (see para. 18 above). The following is a summary of the activities undertaken by the Secretariat to provide the Commission with adequate resources to meet that need.

56. The Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea provides the services of Secretary and Deputy-Secretary of the Commission, the secretaries of subcommissions and other related services performed by legal officers, as well as two GIS officers and other staff. One of the GIS officers is currently hired on a temporary basis due to the lack of available posts. As indicated in the letter from the

Chairman of the Commission addressed to the President of the seventeenth Meeting of States Parties, the technical and other resources of the Division, as well as the specialized staff dealing with the work of the Commission, have been severely overstretched.

57. The Secretariat established three GIS laboratories equipped with adequate hardware, a large conference room equipped with adequate audio and visualization equipment, a production room equipped with a large-format scanner and plotter, a medium-format plotter and laser monochrome printer, a storage room and eight offices available to the members of the Commission.

58. The first one was completed in 1999, accommodating nine occupants who could work on personal computers equipped to meet heavy computing needs associated with the analysis of large graphic data sets. The computers, initially on loan from the Information Technology and Systems Division of the Department of Management, were connected in a small LAN independent of the large computer network to ensure security of the analysed data. In addition, the Secretariat provided a large colour plotter, a colour scanner, a multimedia projector and a projection screen. The large colour plotter is capable of producing printouts up to 60 inches wide and the colour scanner is capable of scanning paper up to 52 inches wide and half an inch thick. Special GIS software was also obtained as a donation from a vendor, subject to funding for training for the staff. Due to the uncertainties relating to the size of forthcoming submissions, the Secretariat used, for the safe keeping of the first one, an existing small storage facility.

59. The second GIS laboratory was completed in 2004. It was a replica of the first one, but equipped with more advanced computers purchased with funding provided from the budget of the Office of Legal Affairs. A multimedia projector, a projection screen and a light table were also purchased.

60. By the end of 2005, the premises of the Division were rearranged to provide for adequate storage space and an enlarged conference room that could accommodate the plenary meetings of the Commission.

61. By mid 2006, the conference room was equipped with audio and visualization equipment, providing improved communications. In addition, eight laptop computers were purchased. The laptops have the capacity to handle required computing tasks, and can be connected in a small and secure network in the large conference room, converting it, when needed, into a third GIS laboratory. Three state-of-the-art workstations were purchased for the three GIS laboratories for special computing needs. It should be noted that all the facilities are equipped with electronic locks and the access to the premises and to the GIS laboratories and the storage room are subject to round-the-clock video surveillance.

62. Apart from the services referred to above, the Secretariat provides a wide range of GIS services, including data structure preparation in accordance with the analytical needs of the subcommission and hardware and software acquisition, maintenance and operation. The tasks associated with data structure preparation include the following:

(a) Compilation of the hard copy of the data contained in the submission into a consistent GIS format;

(b) Georeferencing of maps;

(c) Analysis of large graphic data sets, including bathymetric and GIS data;

(d) Compilation of spatial information;

(e) Organization and containment of the data;

(f) Calculation of geodetic distances, using a number of different methods, as required;

(g) Manipulation of the vertical exaggeration of bathymetric profiles in a submission;

(h) Creation of bathymetric profiles extending along the whole continental margin, from the shelf to the abyssal;

(i) If the supplied data does not allow for the above, the profiles are combined with profiles generated from data from publicly available grids, such as the General Bathymetric Chart of the Oceans (GEBCO) and Gridded Global Relief Data (ETOPO), following the direction of the submitted profile to show it in a whole-margin context;

(j) Creation of three-dimensional bathymetric models from bathymetric data supplied by the submitting State from publicly available grids such as GEBCO and ETOPO;

(k) Creation of bathymetric profiles from the three-dimensional models;

(l) Preparation of grids, including bathymetry, slope surface, slope of slope and profile curvature, according to preset guidelines;

(m) Creation of stacks of bathymetric profiles around the margin of the submitting State;

(n) Creation of sediment thickness profiles;

(o) Running the 1 per cent sediment thickness formula for seismic data supplied by the coastal State, using a number of different methods;

(p) Scanning and georeferencing hard copies of maps supplied by the coastal State;

(q) Research for additional scientific or bathymetric information that might exist for a given area and incorporation of any data found relevant into the consistent GIS format.

63. At the eighteenth session of the Commission, when five subcommissions had to work simultaneously, it became evident that the specialized staff, as well as the technical and other facilities, were overstretched. Consequently, the Commission reiterated its concerns regarding the preparedness of the Secretariat to provide the necessary services in view of its increasing workload. In response, the Secretariat prepared a summary of needs on the basis of its previous requests and identified requirements:

(a) *Staff*: considering the nature of work it becomes necessary to add two additional GIS officers and regularize the status of one of the current GIS officers;

(b) *Hardware*: there is a need for a server and a backup solution, two multimedia projectors, a colour laser jet printer and two black and white laser jet printers;

(c) *Software*: the following are required: ESRI, Caris, GeoCap, GeoMod, GeoSoft, Marzone, Surfer, ERDAS Imagine and Fledermaus Pro applications and training for Caris, GeoCap, Surfer and ERDAS Imagine;

(d) *Office equipment*: storage will have to be upgraded with movable shelves to maximize space.

64. The Chairman, after consultation with the members of the Commission, approved the list of needs and stated that he expected it to be included in the subprogramme budget proposal for the 2008-2009 biennium. The Office of Legal Affairs has included the list in its budget proposal. During the review of the programme budget proposals, the Office was informed that the proposed increase in the budget for obtaining the necessary equipment can only be obtained through the issuance of a programme budget implication document in relation to a General Assembly resolution on oceans and the law of the sea.

Increased use of the trust fund to defray the cost of participation of members from developing States, combined with a call for additional contributions

65. Several issues related to the financial implications of the proposed measures concerning the participation of the members of the Commission in its work have already been mentioned under relevant headings. In relation to the financing of the participation of members of the Commission from developing States, a voluntary trust fund was established by the Secretary-General in response to the request contained in paragraph 20 of General Assembly resolution 55/7. The fund covers both travel expenses and daily subsistence allowances.

66. Regarding the use of the trust fund, it is recalled that about two years ago, the fund was at risk of being depleted. At the end of 2005, the total reserves and fund balances stood at only $49,628,[1] while the cost of covering a session of the Commission amounted to approximately $44,000, including programme support costs of 13 per cent (see ST/SGB/188, para. 47). However, recent generous contributions by donor States have improved the sustainability of the trust fund.

67. As at the end of February 2007, the reserves and fund balances were approximately $145,000. That figure includes a contribution by New Zealand of $30,000, in December 2006, and a contribution of $100,000 by Iceland, in January 2007. In March 2007, China made a contribution of $20,000, Japan contributed $205,000 and the United Kingdom contributed 50,000 pounds sterling (£).[2] In 2006, Ireland pledged the sum of 150,000 euros (€) in three annual instalments of €50,000. The first instalment was credited to the trust fund in 2006 and the second instalment of €50,000 was paid in March of 2007.

Reviewing the terms of reference of the trust fund in order to meet the needs of the Commission

68. The review of the terms of reference of the trust fund, adopted by the General Assembly, must be undertaken in the same forum.

---

[1] Figure from the audited accounts. The figure from the provisional accounts provided in January 2006 was in the region of $39,000.

[2] Status as at 31 March 2007. Additional information regarding the contributions to the trust fund will be provided orally during the Meeting of States Parties.

69. It is recalled that the purpose of the trust fund is to defray the cost of participation of the members of the Commission from developing States in the meetings of the Commission. The trust fund is thus limited in its scope and some other members of the Commission, for example those from countries with economies in transition, continue to experience difficulties with financing (SPLOS/148, para. 76).